

A First Look at Kerry and Clare

By B. R. BAKER*

We had long promised ourselves a holiday in southern Ireland, and as my wife was particularly keen to see the Burren plants at their best, the timing of the visit became almost automatic. We therefore booked a passage on the m.v. Innisfallen for the night sailing of 31st May/1st June, with the return from Cork two weeks later.

In trying to assess what a lepidopterist might reasonably expect to find over this period, I found much help from reading in this and other journals of the experiences of numerous entomologists, and from none more so than the late H. C. Huggins who made the astonishing total of 36 collecting trips to Ireland.

The crossing was very smooth and comfortable and the only slight difficulties encountered next morning were in squeezing through between the regimented rows of vehicles to one's own car and then in finally escaping from the somewhat confusing system of traffic ways in the city of Cork.

Having also read of the unpredictable Irish weather, we went prepared for the worst, but in the event no first visit could have been blessed with sunnier skies, though it was only after returning home in mid-June and hearing of conditions in southern England that we fully realised our good luck.

We had booked at a remote farmhouse on the Dingle Peninsula for our first week and chose to travel there by way of Bantry, Glengarriff, Kenmare and Killarney, thus seeing on this first day something of the justly famous scenery of the south west.

My main objective entomologically was *Conopia scoliaeformis* Borkhausen, and to see how these would compare with specimens which Barry Goater and I had found at Rannoch in 1975. Clearwing searching can be a lengthy job, but the Gods were in benign mood that first day in Ireland for they willed me to park the car close to a well grown birch which showed unmistakable patches of frass here and there among the lichen which festooned the trunk. Careful carpentry with mallet and chisel produced half a dozen cocoons, each attached to the back of the excavated blocks of bark.

After this propitious introduction to Irish entomology, we drove on through Killarney and along the fuschia bordered road towards Inch and then the final few miles to Minard. At the end of this memorable first of June I sat at the cliff edge just behind our farmhouse with the Honda purring away nearby and noticed with satisfaction a pair of *Acronycta euphorbiae myricae* Guenee in amongst a select gathering of *Ceramica pisi* (Linnaeus), *Eumichtis adusta* (Esper) and *Apamea crenata* (Hufnagel).

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The following morning we were able to take stock of our immediate surroundings and noted first a kitchen garden wherein were flying numerous *Pieris napi* (Linnaeus), *Euchloe cardamines hibernica* Williams and *Calophrys rubi* (Linnaeus). The cliffs nearby were carpeted with drifts of bird's foot trefoil and thrift, but sea campion, the foodplant of *Hadena caesia mananii* Gregson, was absent so we decided to seek the plant further along the peninsula.

We headed for Dingle and then through Ventry and out to remote Slea Head, but en route it was impossible to drive past those inviting looking fields bordering the main road to Dingle and which were patterned with orchids, yellow irises, bog bean and royal fern. Yet amongst this richness of plants insects were few, except for *Ortholitha mucronata umbrifera* Prout, which were to be found amongst the gorse bushes on the earthen banks which act as field boundaries. On one such bank we also saw our only Common Lizard. Huggins has written of the scarcity of sea campion when compared with an abundance in pre-war years and attributes this scarcity to the grazing pressure from increased cattle stocks. Whatever the reason may be, we failed to find *Silene maritima* on this particular day, even on exposed cliffs which would be inaccessible to cattle. The search however led us to a delightful little sandy cove below Dunquin where the sunlit slopes were alive with *Polyommatus icarus* (Rottemburg) and where the row of upturned currachs on the warm sand gave expression to a way of life where urgency seemed unknown. The main topic of conversation to be had from the one aged local who came down to chat to us was of the excitement aroused by the making of the film "Ryan's Daughter" thereabouts some years previously.

The next day we returned to Killarney with its jaunting cars and crowds of overseas visitors, but soon escaped to the quite seclusion of Muckross. Whilst I was parking the car in a glade, my wife noticed a blackish insect flying in a straight line at a height of about 7 feet; it proved to be a large *Atolmis rubricollis* (Linnaeus) and the only one we were to encounter. *Leptidea sinapis juvernica* Williams however, which we also saw here in moderate numbers, were subsequently proved to be quite common during our second week up in Co. Clare.

Further along the Kenmare road, whilst admiring our first sight of that very local plant the Giant Butterwort, we flushed a specimen of *Eustrotia bankiana* (Fab.), a species which was then regularly seen in the boggy hollows between roads and lakes. Some of the birch trunks in this area bore the old emergence holes of *C. scoliaeformis* (Borkh.), but after a careful search no more trunks showing signs of larval infestation were found. Doubtless the moth returns to favoured trunks to oviposit and it is but a question of patient search to find such a tree if one cares to lose all track of time. We had been most fortunate two days earlier to come upon a favoured tree early and because of this stroke of luck were well satisfied.

Before returning to Minard I wanted to see something of the area famed in earlier years for *Leucodonta bicoloria* (D. & S.), hence we drove there through the impressive Ballaghbeana Gap and down into the beautiful valley of Glencar. The Caragh Woods seemed to be very enclosed with coniferous plantings here and there among the birches, hence lights would be screened from other suitable habitat close by. Perhaps if one possessed the singleness of purpose to operate a lamp there every night of one's stay, regardless of weather conditions, slightly varying the position of the lamping area on each occasion, a white prominent might be the reward!

The remainder of our stay in Kerry was spent mainly in the close vicinity of Minard. The fields there belonging to the farm gave ample scope for walking and were a constant source of interesting bird life as well as insects. A pair of choughs, with tumbling ragged flight, were regular visitors and we later discovered their nest site in an inaccessible hole on a precipitous cliff face. It was also from these fields that we detected another cove, a couple or so miles distant, where sea campion proved to be abundant and where, by using all our cable, the lamp was operated down on a ledge on two successive nights.

On the first night when about to switch on at 10.25 p.m., a cuckoo began calling and continued to do so for several minutes. Perhaps it was a good omen for during the next couple of hours four very dark *caesia* came to the sheets, accompanied by several dark *H. perplexa capsophila* (Dup.). Other species noted were *Eupithecia pulchellata* Stephens; *Lithimna chlorosata* Scop.; *Gonodontis bidentata* Clerck; *Macrothylacia rubi* (Linnaeus) females; *Deilephila elpenor* (Linnaeus); *Spilosoma lubricipeda* (Linnaeus); *S. luteum* (Hufnagel); *Diarsia rubi* (Vieweg); *Lacanobia oleracea* (Linnaeus); *L. biren* (Goeze); *Hadena rivularis* (Fab.); *H. bicruris* (Hufn.); *Orthosia gracilis* (D. & S.); *Cucullia umbratica* (Linnaeus); *Acronycta euphorbiae myricae* Guenee and *A. rumicis* (Linnaeus).

In the early hours when driving back to the farm down a sunken Lane, we heard a strange rasping sound coming from a high bank. We stopped the car and listened but were none the wiser. The following night, after having lamped in the same spot and taken four more *caesia*, we found ourselves back at the same bank with the rasping call still in full voice. This time I took a torch, climbed the bank and jumped down into the softness of a grassy field from whence the sound continued unabated. As I moved, so the sound seemed to move, and for some minutes we played cat and mouse. Then, with a flutter it was away across the ray of the torch and off into the blackness of the night — our first introduction to a corncrake!

The next morning there was a different weather pattern. The light was for ever changing over the sea, clouds raced over Dingle Bay, a rainbow ended down in the fields and

a white-crested expanse of angry water stretched across the eight miles to the opposite shore.

I chose this sort of day to have a careful search along the terraces of thrift for larvae of *Bembecia muscaeformis* (Esper). After some hours I had to give up and tell myself that probably it didn't occur there, taking some comfort from Huggins' comment to the effect that "my only recent record is near Glengarriff where it is very local and scarce". I did find a footman larva sheltered against a rock face and thought at first that we had turned up *Eilema caniola* (Hübner), but it proved to be *E. complana* (Linnaeus) and produced a nice specimen when back in Reading. Nonetheless, it was invigorating to be out on these cliffs in such conditions and to watch the choughs, guillemots and fulmars making light of the rough weather. The wind didn't abate all day and though we walked Inch Strand during the afternoon it would have been a waste of valuable time to have attempted mothing there that night. Neither were conditions ideal on the following night, but this time it was a question of now or never and we lit up at 10 p.m. Despite gusts from all quarters, *D. porcellus* (Linnaeus) was early to the sheets, followed by *Smerinthus ocellata* (Linnaeus); *Hada nana* (Hufnagel); *Hadena confusa* (Hufnagel) and some very dark *Rusina ferruginea* (Esper). My lasting memory of this night is of cinnabar moths which came early and stayed late. A whole squadron of them with engines revving and wings aquiver made a colourful sight—we counted over 50, all being watched over by a solitary toad who, bemused by the activity, could but stare in wonderment!

Next day we moved quarters to Co. Clare and stayed at the very comfortable Fernhill Farmhouse, a few miles outside Lisdoonvarna. Our hosts were most helpful and, understanding the ways of lepidopterists, accepted our late hours as perfectly normal.

That first evening we made acquaintance with the well known Doolin Strand, a veritable rock garden, where gulls and ringed plovers were ever wide awake and daylight seemed to linger long past 11 o'clock. Larvae of *Setina irrorella* (Linnaeus) were to be found on the lichen covered rocks and we searched for them until it was dark enough to start the generator. Within a short time, two of the beautiful bluish form of *caesia* came to the sheets, together with several *H. perplexa capsophila* (Dup.) and *N. nana* (Hufnagel). This made a fitting end to a busy day and we put the generator into early retirement at midnight.

Although we had expected to see *Euphydryas aurinea* (Rott.) and *Hemaris tityus* in Kerry, we didn't come across either, but both were soon in evidence on this first and subsequent days in Clare. *H. tityus* (L.) was covering the ground at the rate of knots, never seeming to settle, and we almost gave up hope of ever taking one. Luckily we found some good patches of lousewort growing in the shelter of a conifer plantation and by patiently waiting in that warm hollow a

tityus would now and again appear hovering over the flowers and allow one a chance with the net.

Perhaps the limestone hills behind Ballyvaughan were the richest areas we found for plants and lepidoptera, and it was indeed a welcome change from the often austere collecting days in southern England to be confronted with insects of quality in quantity. It was fortunate that the daytime weather we experienced was favourable for insects for subsequent night conditions at Doolin were either poor or impossible.

Although the going was fairly rough and spikey to the knees, these rugged limestone slopes occupied most of our attention for the rest of our time in Clare. On the lower slopes *L. sinapis juvernica* Williams and *Erynnis tages baynesi* Huggins were common and *Adscita statices* (Linnaeus) was not infrequent. *Boloria euphrosyne* (Linnaeus) occurred slightly higher up on the rocky terrain but was going over. *Zygaena purpuralis hibernica* Reiss; *Odezia atrata* (Linnaeus) and *Photedes captiuncula* (Treits.) seemed most prevalent where the thorny scrub gave way to a steep meadow-like area with a prolific growth of plants such as *Lotus*, *Anthyllis* and *Thymus*. Amongst this richness of species, I came across a small moth which was sitting on a sunlit bracken frond and raising and lowering its wings in an agitated manner. On seeing the whitish forewings, each with two wedge-shaped black rays, I began to think we had turned up a new species but then realised that we were faced with a remarkable aberration of *Pseudopanthera macularia* (Linnaeus).

One could have happily stayed in this area for the complete remainder of the holiday, but there were other interests to satisfy, the impressive Cliffs of Moher to visit and one or two hills to climb. Not that the mountains here have the grandeur of Kerry, but they have a charm all of their own and their ascent is easy. The tops are flat and bare and one expected insects to be few, but 1,000 ft. up on Slieve Elva in a small heathery depression we came across several *E. tages baynesi* Huggins and *Semiothisa clathrata hugginsi* (Baynes). We also saw a fox running over this inhospitable terrain.

Conditions for mothing at Doolin on our last night, 12th/13th June, improved and as well as seeing three more *caesia* new arrivals were *Coenotephria salicata latentaria* (Curtis) and *Eupithecia distinctaria constrictata* Guenee.

On 13th June we took leave of Fernhill and drove leisurely towards Cork, by way of Limerick and Mallow, in readiness for the evening sailing. Whilst brewing-up by a flowery meadow, Heather drew my attention to a white moth flying with purposeful intent near our car. It proved to be a female *Diaphora mendica* (Clerck), which later obliged with eggs; the offspring are awaited with interest.

It would be amiss to end this account without a word on the friendliness shown by all whom we met. Typical was an occasion in Cork on that last evening when we were both becoming more and more frustrated at trying to find parking space in that busy city. A complete stranger gave us one of

his parking permits, pointed out a useful shopping centre and "because the wife will then be ready for a cup of tea", recommended a pleasant tea shop. He expressed our own thoughts as he drove away by saying "I hope you will both want to come back again".

P.S. The birch blocks with the *scoliaeformis* cocoons travelled perfectly well and were then kept outside in the garden in a large glass aquarium tank, having been reaccommodated into a large cushion of sphagnum moss which rested on six inches of damp sand. Emergences took place from 24th June to 7th July. These confirmed Baynes's observations that specimens from Ireland are indeed larger than those from Scotland; comparative wingspan ranges being 28-34 mm. and 25-30 mm.

Current Literature

British Caterpillars. Butterflies; Moths Bk. I; Moths Bk. II.

An illustrated selection of caterpillars found in the British Isles. Text and coloured photographs by George Hyde.

Jarrold Colour Publications, Norwich, 40p each.

George Hyde needs little introduction to our readers as a field lepidopterist and photographer. In this series of three little books each illustrates 40 different larvae in colour, in their natural postures on their foodplants. The plates are superb and apart from their aesthetic appeal, form an excellent reference source. It is to be hoped that the series will be continued.

There are introductions on habits and rearing techniques. Each plate has a short summary of the distribution, time of appearance, how to find and pupating habits of each species.

The species figured include many which have rarely been photographed before, such as: *Erebia epiphron*, *Coenonympha tullia*, *Pyrgus malvae*, *Chaonia ruficornis*, *Eilema caniola*, *Hadena contigua*, *Notodonta trepida*, *Hyppa rectilinia*, to name but a few.

Well worth having at a bargain price. — E.H.W.

COSMOPTERIX ZIEGLERELLA (HUBNER) IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE.
— On 4th September, 1976, I found empty mines of *Cosmopterix zieglerella* at Horseheath in Cambridgeshire. This represents a new vice-county record for the species, as well as a considerable extension of the known range of what is normally considered a rare moth.

Such an extension suggests that it would be worth while for entomologists to look for this species on hop in areas where it was not previously known to occur. Such search has already produced a record from South Essex by Col. Emmet.
— P. J. JOHNSON, 7 Haverhill Road, Horseheath, Cambridge, CB1 6QR, 1.ii.1978.